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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2075
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2081
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2103
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1442
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SUBJECT: TAJIK MINISTRY OF INTERIOR OFFICIALS EVICT RESIDENTS, TAKE OVER BUILDING

11. On April 26 Ministry of Interior officials forcefully evicted residents who illegally occupied a rundown 52-unit building in Dushanbe. When PolOff arrived on the scene, at least 30 police officers had surrounded the area, and one fire truck and an ambulance were poised and ready for emergencies. Women and children, blankets and carpets were scattered cross the area surrounding the building. Despite residents' protests, officials removed all belongings from their apartments and loaded them along with the residents onto open-top trucks. According to a colonel who was in charge of the eviction, the government will relocate residents to their hometowns as indicated on their internal passports. Most residents originally came from the south, but some will be sent back to as far away as the Gorno-Badakhshan region. The residents were internally displaced persons who arrived in Dushanbe after the end of the civil war to find jobs.

12. Residents were visibly upset, but also helpless to act. One woman threatened to set herself on fire in protest rather than be evicted. The Ministry of Interior colonel overseeing the eviction responded with: "Let her burn." This indifferent comment was made right in front of PolOff and certainly explains the fire truck and ambulance. Fortunately, the woman did not set herself on fire in the end and no other violent incidents occurred, although some officers did walk around with billy clubs and undoubtedly were prepared to use them. The eviction proceeding began in 2006 and officers said that in November 2006 one woman did indeed set herself on fire in protest. The media did not report on the incident.

13. Such severe acts reflect the residents' desperation. The building the residents lived in had no windows or locks on the doors, no running water or electricity. Most of the squatters arrived approximately five to six years ago with families and small children and have no relatives in the capital and no alternative places to reside. Being evicted and forcefully moved back to their hometowns means that they will lose their jobs and any income they may have earned in Dushanbe.

14. Residents told PolOff the building in question and an adjacent building belonged to an opposition supporter during the civil war who is now in prison. In early April, a Tajik court decided that his properties now belong to the government. The Ministry of Interior received permission to renovate the buildings into apartments for needy Ministry of Interior officials.

15. COMMENT: Although the residents were indeed squatters, the justice system's decision to give the building to the Ministry of Interior brings into question whether or not the decision is legal. It is likely that the court system found "technical errors" in the owner's documentation and deemed the property illegally owned in the first place. So far, no one has disputed the court's decision. Although the building is not located in zone one, where officials are slowly evicting residents to accommodate a new city plan, this latest incident compounds Dushanbe citizens' fears and anger towards authorities trying to take over their homes. In numerous other cases, city authorities have seized buildings or property seemingly at will without regard to finding a reasonable solution for residents.
END COMMENT.

JACOBSON